A TALE OUT OF SEASON

BY

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ILLUSTRATION (SEE FRONTISPIECE) BY F. WALTER TAYLOR

NO disaster had ever a happier beginning. Young Evanston, lounging on Brainerd's window-seat after a "nine-o'clock," heard the telephone ring, and rose to answer it, anticipating pleasure. Brainerd himself, savagely marking a pile of Greek 1 examination papers with red ink, paid no heed.

Evanston smiled into the telephone, then he spoke softly. He had a passion for perfection unusual in an undergraduate. He was handsome, he dressed well, and he spoke even better.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Allison. . . . He's here. . . . Certainly."

Brainerd laid down his pen and took the receiver from Evanston's hand. He was an older man, nervous, brilliant, keen of face and speech.

"Yes, Nellie. . . . Did you ever hear anything as absurd as this pigeon's soft cooing? . . . Hush, he's far too vain already. . . . What! . . . Holloway! Here? . . . To-night? . . . I should say so! . . . No, he's too young."

"I'm not," said young Evanston.

"He has an engagement."

"I have not!" said Evanston.

"Eight o'clock." Brainerd hung up the receiver with a brotherly indifference to polite farewells. He stood for an instant with his hands in his pockets, looking down at his protégé. He liked to have a student following him, listening in admiration to his cynical speeches, quoting him, copying his tobacco, his manners, his clothes. He would have said that Evanston was the only one of a long line who was really worth while. His sister said that he had spoiled the others; he answered that he had merely tried them in the fire.

"Holloway is to be here to-night," he announced.

"The ambassador!" said Evanston. The youngest, stupidest undergraduate knew who Holloway was; Evanston, who had listened the night before to a political gossip at the Minturns', felt that he knew what Holloway might become.

"Yes. Allison was a distant cousin of his, and he's always talked about coming to see Nellie. She wants me to come to dinner, and says that I am to bring you to amuse Mabel. Minturn will be there, and Motter and Simpson."

"The great Holloway!" said Evanston, again.

"Yes. Now don't bother me."

Brainerd sat down to his work, and Evanston stared out of the window, across the huge, homely bulk of Cascadilla, the fresh green treetops at the brink of the gorge, the gabled roofs of the fraternity houses, to the blue lake, lying like a broad and peaceful river far below.

Evanston was intensely, inexpressibly happy. It was spring; he was about to graduate *magna cum laude;* he had few responsibilities and an ample income. He had had all the student honors that one man could possibly have; he belonged to a fraternity of the Star League; twice he had been president of his class; he had been editor of the *Cornell Magazine,* and afterward editor of *The Widow,* a change that to the student mind was an honorable promotion. In its wide-margined pages he could express his conviction of the asininity of the University gardener; he could fulminate violently against the coeducation which, he thought, was ruining the University; he could even take Prexy to task. The editor of *The Widow* was usually brilliant, not always popular, but always a molder of student opinion.

Evanston had not been thus elevated without cause. He had the sort of friendliness that brings popularity. Besides, he was a good student, a prize-winner, and a Phi Beta Kappa. He was naturally bright — Brainerd never suffered any admirers who were not. Brainerd himself had picked out most of his courses, scolding, meanwhile, about the incapacity of the men who gave them.

"Motter is simple-minded, but you must

have Fine Arts 13. It will give you a foundation that you can't get in any other way. Niles can't write a decent sentence, but you've got to have daily themes, and he'll keep your nose to the grindstone."

It was Brainerd who was really responsible for Evanston's steady application. He had taken him abroad for a summer, and had taught him as much art and history as many cultivated men learn in all their lives. Evanston bade fair, not without his own satisfied knowledge, to become as hard and brilliant as Brainerd himself.

At this moment it seemed to him that his cup of pleasure was about to run over. He said to himself that the invitation to Mrs. Allison's was more of a compliment than his election to Phi Beta Kappa. Mrs. Allison was fond of him, and Brainerd was kind; but neither would have invited him unless they knew he would be a credit to them and to himself. Even the wishes of Mabel Nathurst, Mrs. Allison's niece, his companion at Junior balls and Sophomore cotillions, would have had no influence on this occasion. He knew perfectly well that few situations found him at a loss; he knew that there was no one in the University who could tell a story with more appropriateness or ease. His hostess, he said to himself, probably wished to show the great Holloway what Cornell could do with good material.

He was curious to see Holloway. He no longer expected all great men to be socially attractive; he thought of this great man as a background for himself, a questioner for his own knowledge, an appreciative audience for Clement Evanston. It must be insisted upon once more that he was not altogether responsible for his colossal vanity, and that, impossible as it may seem, there remained, in spite of Brainerd, a tiny core of humility and reverence in the center of his heart.

He went out with a short "I'll be back at seven," to which Brainerd nodded curtly, and on to his fraternity house, whose green gables were among those visible from Brainerd's window, and there he sat down at his desk. In spite of his joyous prospect for the evening, he worked hard, hurrying to his lunch and returning almost at once.

The other men looked at him enviously as he stopped at the dining-room door on his way to meet Brainerd. They all admired him and loved him — that was another item on the credit side of Evanston's balance-sheet. Of that, too, alas! our young man was thoroughly aware.

Brainerd was waiting for him, and they started, arm in arm, for the half-mile walk across the campus to the heights where Mrs. Allison lived. Brainerd talked about Holloway, and they crossed the Cascadilla bridge and climbed the sharp hill beyond without seeing the magic beauty all about them. There were soft lights on every side, shining out more and more clearly as the last glow of the sunset faded, red-shaded in the Psi U house close at hand, brighter in the gymnasium across the avenue, multitudinous in the homely front of Sage. Then, suddenly, the two men stood still, breathless. It was as if the bubbling music of the runnel between Sage and Barnes had formed a curtain, which lifted as they crossed the bridge.

"What is it?" cried Evanston.

"Hush!" whispered Brainerd. "Listen to Arnold's 'cello!"

Young Evanston stretched out his arms as if to welcome the approach of some exquisite spirit. It was not only that he heard the solemn, heart-tearing strains of the Schubert andante: it was that with the music he became suddenly aware of the night — the faint, vanishing gleam of the sunset, the mystery of the dark masses of trees, the golden glory of the moon rising behind the pines on the slope across the avenue. He could not see the lake, moonlit, quiet, far below them, but he was conscious also of its witchery and peace.

"It was 'Death and the Maiden,'" said Brainerd, who still whispered. "They are practising for a concert. Listen!"

Evanston sat down on the coping of the little bridge and hid his face in his hands. The music began with a soft and rippling sound that was neither a chord nor an arpeggio. It could not be described; it was like the singing water beside them. Then, at once, rose a girl's voice, fresh, clear, as magic-filled as the night:

> "Awake! awake! my love, softly rise.
> None other from slumber awaken!
> The brook murmurs low; the light zephyr flies;
> No leaf by its soft breath is shaken."

She sang with the rippling music; she let it soar above her like a leaping fountain; she rose far above it, as if it could not accompany her ecstasy; and then once more she sang with it, as if her rapture needed its support.

"Come," said Brainerd, "we'll be late. You act as if you were drunk."

"I am! It makes me wild with pain and joy and wretchedness and bliss."

"Strauss is a modern like yourself. Come. You'll be reconciled to coeducation if you listen any longer."

"I should be reconciled to it now if it could be an embodied joy like that. See the white flowers in front of the Vet, how they shine! See

how grim the pines are; see the light creeping, creeping along there by the chapel. This heavenly spot! And listen!"

"Come along, crazy boy!"

"I want everything in the world"— he knew well enough the quiet, pleased grin with which Brainerd listened to his raving. "I want everything in the world. I want Mabel, and that coed's voice, and all the music, and all this loveliness. I want to go back to Assisi and live in a cave and meditate; I want to go to Amalfi and spend my life wandering up and down that esplanade above the bay. I want to be Czar of all the Russias. I want to be a cantor and chant the Hymn of the Dead in a synagogue. I want to go back to Rome, and creep on my knees to the high altar of St. Peter's and throw myself down, a penitent. I want to be Alexander and Napoleon and Paolo and Francesca. I want all the pleasure and all the pain in the world. I——"

"You'll get some of the last, be sure of that," said Brainerd grimly. Then he touched Evanston's arm. "Look!"

They stopped on the bridge across the Fall Creek Gorge. Before them, across its black pit, Triphammer plunged noisily; beside the falls, vanishing into apparently lower depths than their foam-flecked mass, dropped the walls of the hydraulic laboratory, straight, unbroken, as grim as the cliff itself.

"One moment you might want everything in the world," said young Evanston, shivering. "And the next you might be lying down there, broken, dead."

Mrs. Allison's house was low and broad, as behooved a house that chose to cling so closely to the top of a rock wall plunging sheerly a hundred and fifty feet from the floor of its side piazza. A bit farther down the gorge, the water fell again, not noisily, as at Triphammer, but sliding soundlessly over a broken cliff, down, down into a gulf apparently bottomless, whose sides rounded out into a mighty, tree-lined bowl. Here, again, was music, Strauss once more, drifting from a fraternity house far across the void, but seeming to rise, the product of enchantment, from the depths below.

Mrs. Allison's piazza had no railing but a solid wall, waist-high. Even so, many of her friends did not care to venture out on it. Neither she nor her niece had any such fear. They sat there for a moment with Brainerd and Evanston and their distinguished cousin; then rose, sighing a little, to go into the drawing-room to receive the other guests.

They came together — Minturn, of the Law School, who had been on a Philippine commission; the despised Motter, who knew not only Italy and Greece, but the East, as he knew his own campus; and Simpson, of the Department of Economics. They were middle-aged men, a good deal alike in appearance and difficult to entertain. Holloway was a grave, rather silent person, who looked unequal to the diplomatic tasks that he was said to have accomplished. Evanston thought that it was no wonder that Mrs. Allison had called Brainerd and him to her aid.

Evanston did not begin to talk at once. He had good manners; he knew what was becoming to a young man, even among rather stupid elders. He listened to the quiet voices about him, to Mabel Nathurst and Brainerd laughing over a University story, to Mrs. Allison and Simpson discussing the health of Simpson's motherless children,— of all subjects for a dinner-table! — to Motter's long account of a journey from Bokhara to Samarkand. Evanston said to himself that the story was wretchedly told. and that he had a much better one. The lights were softly shaded, the dinner was excellent, and the magic of the night seemed to have crept into the pretty dining-room. Mabel was exceedingly pleasant to watch; she made a conversion to Catholicism or a devotion to Jewry seem less attractive than a nearer, more probable happiness.

It was not until the dinner was nearly over that Evanston told his story. It was in reality Brainerd's story, but Brainerd did not seem to remember it or to see its peculiar appropriateness as a climax to Motter's stupid tale. Evanston even gave Brainerd a chance to tell it; but Brainerd said: "Go ahead; I haven't an idea of what you're talking about."

Evanston did not realize that Mrs. Allison had been at that moment ready to rise; he did not reflect that, since Brainerd had told him the story, it was barely possible that Mrs. Allison had heard it; he did not stop to remember that, in spite of its excellence as a story, it was almost too cruel to be told at all. The Ancient Mariner was not more thoroughly obsessed by necessity for speech. Mabel Nathurst heard the beginning, and asked him to speak louder.

"It isn't a *jeune fille* story," he answered.

"Tell it, nevertheless," commanded Mabel.

Evanston obeyed, raising his voice so that the men at the other end of the table might hear. It was a story of the desert, like Motter's, a tale of incredible, cowardly desertion of a sick man by his companion. The sick man did not die, but reappeared, months afterward, to face the deserter in his club in New York and to kill him.

No story was ever more brilliantly or more

easily told. The raconteur might have been forty instead of twenty. He even smiled at Brainerd's warning stare as he assigned professional jealousy instead of love for the same unworthy woman as the reason for the travelers' hatred of each other. He had an impression that Brainerd was trying to touch him under the table, and he mischievously drew his feet back under his chair. He had made it a *jeune fille* story, since Mabel was there; but he regretted now that he had not waited until he was alone with the men, so that he could have told it all.

He had a moment of panic at the breathless quality of the silence that followed. He had not meant to frighten them like that! Mabel Nathurst cried, "Oh, how terrible!" Mrs. Allison's face worked strangely; she laid her napkin down and rose precipitately. The men looked down at the table. Only Holloway seemed entirely unmoved.

"The desert plays queer tricks with people," he said in comment. Then he made mention of a telegram that must be sent, and followed Mrs. Allison and Mabel out.

It was Brainerd who spoke first, hardly waiting until the door was closed. His hot temper, chilled usually into cynicism, flared out uncontrollably.

"You intolerable cub!" he snarled. "What did you mean by telling that story?"

"It was a perfectly good story. It was *your* story! I made it proper; it might have been told in the nursery."

"I should say so — any nursery rather than here!"

"Why?" Evanston's eyes widened like a stupid child's.

"Why! Because it was Holloway's brother."

"Who was deserted?" gasped Evanston.

"No; the other."

"Do people — do people know it?"

"Know it! The world knows it — all you told, and every nasty, wretched detail you omitted."

"And *I* told it!" It was his first thought, that he, Clement Evanston, could have been so grossly stupid. He might have known that something was wrong: Brainerd's stare might have told him, or Mrs. Allison's confusion. He looked round helplessly at the older men. If it had been anger that he saw in their eyes, he might have defended himself with quick speech. How could he have known that it was Holloway's brother? Brainerd had no business to tell him such a tale, or to tell him without mentioning the names of the principals, if it were, as he said, public property.

But the older men did not look at him angrily, only with pity and a little contempt. Middle-aged professordom had not been entirely oblivious to the pointed shafts of *The Widow*.

It was their contempt that held up a shining mirror to young Evanston's eyes. In it he saw himself suddenly as he was, only a little worse. It was an intolerable tale; that of the Cenci was not more terrible in its utter lack of brightness or relief. He should not have told it — never, never! It was a tale such as one should not pass on to another human being. That, he said to himself, a man of kindliness of heart, of taste, of ordinary decency would have known. In that illuminated moment, poor Evanston saw many other things. The president of the University seemed a great and wise man; Niles, of the English Department, became in his eyes what he really was, an inspired and devoted teacher. It even seemed possible that the landscape-gardener might know more about the arrangement of flower beds than Clement Evanston. And Holloway ——

"I shouldn't try to apologize," advised Brainerd, as Evanston rose. "You'll only make it worse."

Evanston did not answer. He did not mean to apologize; he meant only to get away, out into the air, where he could breathe and think. The little piazza offered itself as a place of refuge, and he went out and stood unsteadily, gripping the stone wall for support. The gorge, now in the path of the moonlight, lay faintly illuminated; a fringe of gleaming foam rose above the brink of the falls; the music was still mysteriously exhaled. It prevented Evanston from thinking at first, even from breathing.

He and Brainerd could never be friends again — he foresaw that; but he did not care. The story would spread, the faculty would know it in a day; he did not care for that, either. Mrs. Allison would tell Mabel Nathurst; he could accept that as just punishment. But that he should have so hurt Holloway, that he should have torn open so fearful a wound, he who prided himself upon his good taste, his delicacy of feeling! He could never face himself again. His heart — he realized with a gasp that heartache is not a mere name — his heart lay like a weight in his side. He was, for the first time in his life, wholly, unutterably ashamed; and he had suffered so little shame that he was certain he could not live with it an hour, a moment. In his despair, there seemed to him but one cure.

The arm that fell on his shoulders a moment later was heavy also.

"Boy!" said Holloway sternly. Neither he nor Evanston knew exactly what Evanston had meant to do. Nor did Evanston know that he had seized Holloway's arm with the desper-

ate grip of a man who feels his feet slipping on the brink of a precipice. He still grasped the arm as if it were his only means of safety.

"I didn't know anything about it!" he panted. "I am a fool, but I am not such a wretch as that."

Holloway turned him round so that the light from the doorway fell across his tortured young face. Holloway was a man of many cares and responsibilities. He had scarcely noticed Evanston before he had told the story; he had quite forgotten his name. He saw that his face had in it now the passionate misery of childhood and the remorse of age. He looked at him pityingly.

"Oh, I was quite sure you did not know," he said. "You must not feel this way."

"I can never forgive myself," declared young Evanston. "Even if you forgave me a thousand times, I could never forgive myself."

It was a moment before Holloway answered. The music had died away; they seemed to be entirely alone, the moonlit sky above them, the mighty cliff at their feet. For the rest of his life Evanston would not be able to think of what Holloway said without a swelling of the throat and threatening tears. It was so infinitely kind, it could not heal,— nothing could do that for years to come,— but it comforted. It broke Evanston down into helpless, childish crying; it filled his heart with a new and wholesome adoration.

"Oh, but you must forgive yourself," said Holloway. "You see, I have been waiting for thirty years for some one to forget that he was my brother and mention him before me — for thirty years! It has been inhuman, the way they have remembered. Nobody has ever spoken of the poor fellow, even accidentally. Now, you knew the story only as a sort of tradition; you did not know his name. And the next generation will not have heard of him at all. I came out here to thank God for it.

"And now,"— his arm slipped inside Evanston's and stayed there until the boy stopped trembling,—"come, we will go back together."

THE BIRDS OF AENGUS OG

BY

BLANCHE M. KELLY

IN my young youth 'twas I that heard them calling,
The birds of Aengus, Aengus Ever-Young*;
While the pale light between the hills was falling,
I heard the hounds of elf-land giving tongue.

Then of my lot no comfort was I getting;
Low seemed your eaves to me, and strait your door:
After the birds of Aengus was I fretting,
And fain was I to hear their call once more.

Though by rough ways my eager feet went straying
Far and away from all the haunts of men,
Near fairy rings and lonely raths delaying,
Never I won to sight of them again.

At long and last I see their blue wings gleaming,
Soft sounds the call that wooed me to my quest;
Lo! in your eaves the bright birds of my dreaming,
The birds of Aengus Og, have built their nest.

*Aengus Og is the Celtic god of youth and love, and he is said to be always accompanied by four birds, two of them calling constantly, "Come! Come!" and two, "Stay! Stay!"